

Dolphin Dies in Island Creek

By KEITH L. MARTIN

A badly wounded bottlenose dolphin swam into Island Creek on Tuesday, circling in the water for several hours before dying in front of nearly a dozen spectators.

Officials from the New England Aquarium, who were called in to rescue the animal, said the dolphin had died by the time they could reach it around 10:30 a.m. and indicated that a pending autopsy at their headquarters would be needed to determine the animal's exact cause of death.

The dolphin had huge abrasions from its snout to its dorsal fin, with a bloodied right side.

Biologist Connie Merigo, who heads up the aquarium's Rescue and Rehab Team, did indicate that she saw lesions on the dolphin's skin and would conduct a biopsy on the wounds at the aquarium.

She estimated the dolphin at around eight feet long and nearly 600 pounds.

According to Officer Tom Johnson of the Duxbury Police Department, police headquarters received a call at 6:48 a.m. on Tuesday from a jogger who spotted the dolphin from a bridge on Bay Road. The jogger saw the animal lying in the mud and



Connie Merigo (left), a biologist with the New England Aquarium works, with a member of the Animal Rescue League to transport the body of a dolphin that swam into Island Creek Tuesday.

thought it had washed ashore.

Animal Control Officer Matt Riggins arrived on the scene at 7:30 a.m. and said the dolphin most likely entered the creek from a nearby dock area.

Michelle Krusell of Gurnet Road in Duxbury, a volunteer with the aquarium, arrived on

at the same time and immediately reported her findings to biologists in Boston.

2/2

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By 9 a.m., a large crowd had gathered on the bridge on Bay Road to watch the dolphin, which was swimming in tight circles, often coming up for air and tilting its wounded side into the water. Cars lined Bay Road as police directed traffic, and students from the nearby Bay Farm Montessori Academy came down in five or six groups of 20 at a time to view the dolphin.

At 9:15 a.m., Tony La Casse, a spokesperson for the New England Aquarium, arrived at the scene and said that the rescue team was on its way, but delayed by traffic exiting Boston.

By just looking at the animal, La Casse feared the worst.

"Our biologists will come make an assessment, but the dolphin is in rough shape," said La Casse, who lives in Randolph, and came straight to the scene. "When you have mammals like [dolphins] this close to people, it is a bad sign. This one keeps blowing [air] every time it comes up, so it probably has a few hours to live."

By 10 a.m., the tide was rising in the creek off Kingston Bay and the animal's activity was slowing with the dolphin even stopping to cool its wounds on nearby marsh grass.

By this time, the crowd had grown larger on Bay Road, including a camera crew from WBZ Channel 4 in Boston.

At 10:15 a.m., the aquarium's Rescue and Rehab Team arrived at the creek and suited up in boots to wade out into the marsh and attend to the dolphin, which had swum away from the bridge and was

hidden by tall marsh grass. Soon after, a member of the Pembroke branch of the Animal Rescue League of Boston arrived to assist the three-person team from the aquarium.

About twenty minutes later, La Casse gathered spectators on the bridge to tell them that the dolphin was already dead when the team arrived and that biologists believed the "unusual" abrasions might have occurred when the animal got caught in low tide overnight. Movement back and forth in the flats may have rubbed off the animal's vinyl-like skin, exposing the wound to the salt

water of the marsh, he said.

With some children in attendance for the announcement, La Casse said that while the incident was sad, one positive of the event was that it presented a unique opportunity to the aquarium.

"It is wonderful for all of us to realize the riches of marine life you live near [here in Duxbury]," he said. "The autopsy of the dolphin will give us a window into the health of the species out there and determine whether there is an underlying virus or other [health concerns] or if there was an entanglement issue, which it doesn't look like at this time."